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ABSTRACT

This module on rug braiding is one of eight modules designed to provide instruction on authentic Blue Ridge Mountain crafts to adult basic education students at low cost. Contents include notes on the history of rug braiding; process used, including equipment and materials, as well as method described narratively and graphically; and the followup, where the student is told how to progress to higher levels of proficiency. The Fry readability level of this module is 4.5. A teacher's guide which lists resources for each module in the series is available separately (see Note). (MEK)

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SHARING THE ARTS OF THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS

RUG BRAIDING

Conducted By:

Pioneer Cooperative Educational Service Agency
Adult Education Office
Cleveland, Georgia 30528

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PREFACE

"Sharing the Arts of the Blue Ridge Mountains" is written so you, the AGE student, can learn about mountain arts. There are eight modules. Each module tells about the history of one art. Each module tells how to make a useful item the way mountain craftsmen do.

Crafts used to be a way of life for mountain families. People in the mountains were secluded. Families had to make everything they used. Later, city people wanted to buy these items. A crafts market developed. The mountain people found they could enjoy making things and have an income.

Today many people like to make items. It is a pleasure to make things. People still like to buy handmade items. Thus, there is still a market for items that are interesting to make.

In writing these modules, about 30 artists and craftsmen were interviewed. The craftsmen and artists shared the way they created their crafts. Project staff also visited Hambidge Center at Rabun Gap, Georgia; Berea in Kentucky; and Pi Beta Phi Arrowmont School, Gatlinburg, Tennessee. These schools are three of the ones which teach mountain arts and crafts. They were established to teach the mountain people some of the dying crafts in the early 1900's.

Today these schools, as well as John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, North Carolina, and Penland Institute, Penland, North Carolina, have classes. Many vocational-technical schools also teach crafts. Junior colleges sometimes offer non-credit craft courses. The Cooperative Extension Service holds some craft classes. Later you may want to go to a class at one of these schools.

Bob Nichols of Helen, Georgia, did the art work for this project.

Mrs. Ethel Ledford was the special consultant for this module. This project could not have been written without her help. Mrs. Ledford worked with the project staff on the basic techniques and procedures of rug braiding.

If you want to learn more about the Blue Ridge Mountain area or rug braiding, your AGE teacher has a list of books and resources.

MRS. ETHEL LEDFORD, Consultant

Mrs. Ethel Ledford makes a small braided rug.

Mrs. Ethel Thomas Ledford was born in White County, Georgia, in June, 1907. She has lived in the mountain area all her life. She is married to Ernest Ledford who was also born and raised in White County.

Mrs. Ledford's Aunt Lizzie taught her to braid rugs when she was a child. During the depression in the 1930's, she used her skill to make rugs. She then exchanged her rugs for material to make clothes for her children. Her rugs have been made from stockings, men's pants, dresses, and zipper tape.

Since carpets have become popular, there is not as much demand for braided rugs. Thus, Mrs. Ledford uses most of her scraps for quilting. She has quilted 66 quilts during 1977.

Mrs. Ledford, like most mountain people, keeps busy. She is careful not to waste anything. She carries on the tradition of the mountain culture.

I. ABOUT BRAIDED RUGS

When the pioneers came to the Blue Ridge Mountains, few items could be brought. Settlers used materials they had at hand to make things for the home. Cloth was hard to get. It was expensive if bought. Many women wove their own fabric. Thus fabric was treasured. It was used again and again when possible. Scraps were kept for quilting. Adult clothes were cut down for children. As clothing wore out, the cloth was cut into strips. These strips were used to make rugs to cover the cold floors.

Many types of rugs were made in these days. Knitted, crocheted, hooked, and needle woven rugs were popular. Also scalloped rag and braided rugs were often made. Early rugs were mostly for warmth and floor covering. Little attention was paid to design or colors. However, later the women began to think of design. They wanted their rugs pretty and useful.

This project discusses the braided rug. However, it should be interesting to research other types of handmade rugs.

II. HOW TO BRAID A RUG

A braided rug can be made by anyone. Making one requires few supplies. You will need:

1. A pair of <u>sharp</u> scissors.
2. A tapestry needle or bobbie pin.
3. A regular needle.
4. Two safety pins.
5. Some fabric (old or new).
6. A spool of thread.

7. Some small nylon cord.

8. Heavy duty thread or fishing line.

If zipper tape from a zipper factory is available, it makes excellent rugs. Thick fabrics like cotton, polyester knit, or chintz, are good for rugs.

Variety can be created in the rugs by using different colors or fabrics. A good effect is also gotten by using a cloth with a design. The number of rows of each color makes the design of the rug.

Be sure to use cloth of the same weight. Also, use all washable fabric.

These instructions are for a small rug. Two different fabrics are to be used. Use one light color and one dark color fabric.

Prepare the fabric. Wash and iron it. This will help control shrinkage. It will also test the colorfastness. If you are using cloth from old items, be sure to take off all braid, buttons, belts, etc. Now, cut the material so that it will lie flat.

Cut the fabric in one inch strips. Be sure to cut all the strips the same way. Do not cut some on the straight (Figure 1) and some on the bias (Figure 2) of the fabric. Now get two light colored strips. Sew them together on one end. (This can be sewn by hand or machine.) Sew as close to the edge as possible. (Figure 3) Sew enough strips together to make one six foot long piece. Now make two more six foot pieces out of the light colored strips. Be sure to alternate some short and long strips. The seams should not be in the same place on the six foot strips.

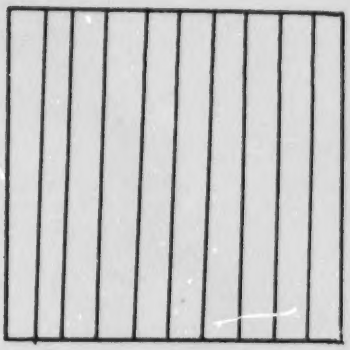

Figure 1

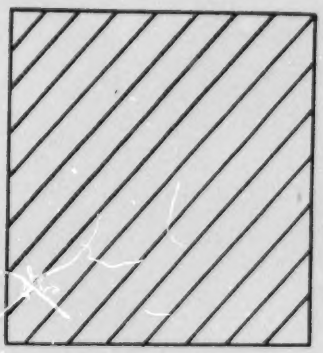

Figure 2

Figure 3

Now, in the same way, make two more light strips. Make these 13 feet, 6 inches long. Make one dark strip that is 13 feet, 6 inches long. Then make two dark strips 21 feet long. Make one light strip 21 feet long.

Now, pick up the three short strips (6 feet). Fold the edges in. (Figure 4) Fold down the middle. (Figure 5) Pin these with a safety pin. (Figure 6)

Put the ends that are pinned in a drawer of a chest or desk. Close the drawer. (Figure 7) This will hold the fabric tight.

To begin the braiding, take the three strips in your hand. Fold the edges in. Now fold in half. (If it is hard to keep the edges turned in, metal braid aids can be bought. These will fold the material.)

Hold these ends under. Put the right strip over the center strip. (Figure 8) Then put the left strip over the center strip. (Figure 9) Keep the braids even. Do not pull the braids too tight. Continue with right over center, left over center, etc. When you have almost reached the end of the strips, stop. Now, get a safety pin. Pin the ends so that they will not come loose.

Take your braid loose from the drawer. Fold it in three lengths. (Figure 10) Each section should be about 16 inches long. Now "thread" the bobbie pin (Figure 11) or tapestry needle with nylon cord. Beginning at the looped end, pull the cord through one loop. Knot it. Alternate right

Figure 4

Figure 5

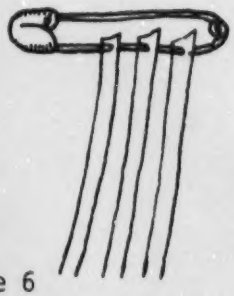

Figure 6

Figure 7

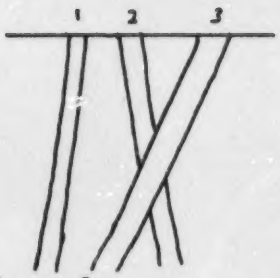

Figure 8

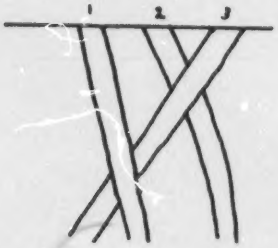

Figure 9

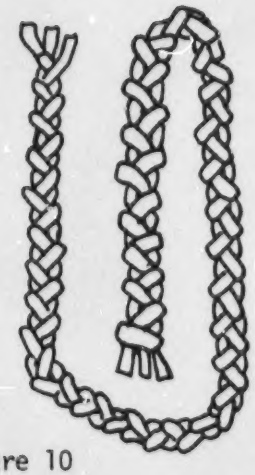

Figure 10

Figure 11

then left. Pull the cord through each outside loop until you reach the curve. This will connect your first two braids. (Figure 12) Always run your needle from the inside to the outside. (Figure 12) If this is done correctly, the cord should show very little if at all. Be sure not to pull the cord too tight. This can make the rug end up looking like a Mexican hat with a point in the middle.

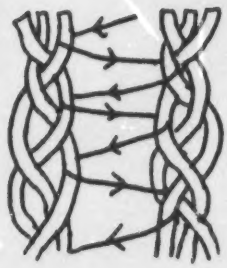

Figure 12

When sewing the curves of the braids, skip every other loop. This will make the braid flexible. It will let the rug lie flat.

Now stitch together the other side. When you are finished your center should look like this. (Figure 13)

Figure 13

To the remaining ends, sew two light and one dark strips. They should be 13 feet, 6 inches long. (Figure 14) Undo the pin. Continue to braid these strips until you almost reach the end. Now pin the ends. Sew this long braid to the center you previously made. You should have two circles. (Be sure to skip every other loop when going around the ends.)

Figure 14

Now take the remaining three strips. Sew them on to the ends of the braid. Continue to braid these. Toward the end, cut the strips at slightly different lengths. (Figure 15) This lets the braids get smaller at the end. When the strips are braided to the end, pin the ends. Sew this braid to the oval with the nylon cord.

Figure 15

Now, find the ends of the braid. Cut the ends in a point. Tuck them under loops of the rug. To hold them tightly, sew them with a needle and thread.

III. WHAT NEXT?

This is the basic method of rug braiding. If there are questions about how to make a rug, find someone in the community who knows how. Watching someone braid makes it easier to follow the directions.

Use this method to make other things. Coasters, hot pads, place mats and rugs of all sizes can be made this way. The difference is mostly the weight of the fabric. For smaller braids, use thin cloth. Narrow strips also make smaller braids.

Items will be different sizes. Thus, your center braids will be different lengths. To figure the length of the center braid, first decide what size item you want. Then subtract the width from the length. The difference is the length of your center braid. (Example: for a 9 x 12 rug, subtract 9 feet from 12 feet. The difference is

3 feet. Your center braid should be 3 feet.) (Figure 16)

Try using light and dark colors. Use fabric with a print.

Braided items make nice gifts.

Other books may help you with rug braiding. The Adult Education teacher has a list of books.

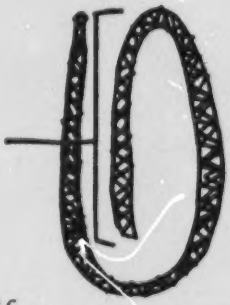

Figure 16

Places to get more information on braided rugs:

Adult Education teacher.

Local Cooperative Extension Service office.

Library.

Places to get rug braiding supplies:

Berry's of Maine. 2022 Main Street, Yarmouth, Maine 04096 (Material, strip cutters, accessories, books)

The Fabric Shop. Route 53, Pembroke, Mass. 02359 (wools, kits, accessories)

Nu-flex Company. 246 First Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701 (wool strips, kits, accessories)